

SPIRITUALITY AND HEALTH

The role of religion and spirituality in the promotion of health has been discussed in numerous medically oriented publications in the last few years. The authors of "Spirituality and Health for Women of Color" in the April 2002 issue of the *Journal* attempt to define spirituality as "an inner quality that facilitates connectedness with the self, other people, and nature."^{1(p557)} The authors quote literature that describes another form of spirituality as "a basic or inherent quality in all humans that involves a belief in something greater than the self and a faith that positively affirms life."^{2(p257)}

I realize that the theme of the April 2002 issue was "women of color," but, in my view, matters of spirituality apply to women of any color, and to men as well. Unfortunately, after initially separating secular and religious spirituality, the authors proceed to discuss only the health benefits of religion.

During more than 50 years of public health and family medical practice, I've become acutely aware that my patients practice many different belief systems. Long ago, I realized that I cannot be all things to all people. What I can do is be myself. I practice secular humanism and ethical culture, but I respect my patients' belief systems and don't try to

convert them to mine. I never "play God," but I tell my patients "I hope that [your] God guides my hand." I became a doctor because it was a calling. Prior to that I worked in public health, which was also a calling. I'm sure it was a calling for many members of the American Public Health Association.

I tell my medical students that they must not only care for patients, they must also care about them. There are no good double-blind studies on the subject, but I believe that this attitude helps the healing process. Therefore, the patient/caregiver relationship can also qualify as a form of spirituality. ■

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About the Author

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References

1. Musgrave CF, Allen CE, Allen GJ. Spirituality and health for women of color. *Am J Public Health*. 2002; 92:557-560.
2. Miller MA. Culture, spirituality, and women's health. *J Obstet Gynecol Neonatal Nurs*. 1995;24: 257-263.